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(U) History Today - 10 December 2013

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(U) On December 11, 1941, Germany and Italy declared war on the United States. This was in accord with their agreements under the Tripartite Agreement of September 1940, which had included Japan in their mutual military arrangements.

(U) The U.S. had been in a period of crisis with Germany ever since the United Kingdom and Germany went to war. There had been no direct clash between the two countries, however; this declaration was prompted by the fact that the U.S. and Japan were now at war.

(U) There had been a COMINT hint that this would occur.

(U) In 1940 the U.S. Army's cryptologic organization, the Signal Intelligence Service, had solved a Japanese machine-generated diplomatic cipher. This was known to the Americans as PURPLE. The Navy joined in exploiting this system, and the two services alternated days in decrypting and distributing intelligence from it.

(U) The Japanese ambassador in Berlin, Oshima Hiroshi, was also a lieutenant general in the army, and proved to be a lucrative source of information about German military matters.

(U) On August 14, 1941, Ambassador Oshima reported meeting a high-level contact who had been at German General Headquarters the previous day. The contact reported that questions about the United States had arisen in the meeting, and Adolph Hitler had said that "if a clash occurs by any chance between Japan and the United States, Germany will at once open war against the United States." Oshima was satisfied that the quotation was genuine.

(U) Britain's cryptologic organization, the Government Code & Cypher School, sent Prime Minister Winston Churchill a copy of the decrypt with this quotation. Churchill asked whether President Franklin Roosevelt had seen it; the head of MI-6, Britain's Secret Intelligence Service, was able to confirm that FDR had indeed been given the decrypt.

(U) The photograph shows Oshima meeting Hitler.

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(U) [Larger view of photo](#)

(U) Have a question or comment on "History Today"? Contact us at DL cch or cch@nsa.

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